(c) Government of India have been implementing a number of schems/ programmes for improving irrigation facilities and rural infrastructure. These include Accelerated Irrigation Benefit Programme for expeditious completion of ongoing major and medium irrigation projects, Drought Prone Area Programme, Desert Development Programme, National Watershed Development Project for Rainfed Areas, Integrated Wasteland Development Programme, Rural Infrastructure Development fund established in NABARD to provide financial assistance to State Governments to augment investments in irrigation, Rural roads and bridges, market yards/godowns, inland waterways etc. Besides, with a view to pass on the benefit of declining interest rate to agriculture sector, public sector banks have reduced their lending rates for agriculture to a maximum of 9 percent per annum on crop loans up to a ceiling of Rs. 50,000. These schemes/programmes are expected to go a long way in improving agricultural production and productivity, thereby improving the rural economy.

Bio-technological developments for agriculture

1216. SHRI PREM CHAND GUPTA: Will the Minister of SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether as per a recent report, India's population would stablize by 2050 when the population is expected to be 1.9 billion;

(b) whether, in order to provide food security to such a huge population, farmers will have to resort to new bio-technological developments; and

(c) if so, Government plans in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE DEPARTMENT OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY IN THE MINISTRY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (SHRI BACHI SINGH RAWAT): (a) Yes, Sir. In a recently held workshop on the Role of Biotechnology in Agriculture organized by Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) it was brought out that population of the country is likely to stablize by 2050 at a level of 1.9 billion.

(b) and (c) The biotechnological interventions are playing and would continue to play a significant role in sustainable food security of the

country in the future. Apart from increasing the yield, biotechnology has a great potential in enhancing nutritive value of food crops. India can benefit from this frontier technology both in terms of increased production and enhanced nutritional quality crops.The Department of Biotechnology as well as Indian Council of Agricultural Research independently and in collaboration have initiated several research and development activities in this direction. The National Agricultural Research System is also addressing most of the concerns for meeting the food and nutritional demand of the ever-growing population through indigenous development of transgenics in various crops especially to address the problem of tolerance to biotic/abiotic stresses. To strengthen research in biotechnological application in agriculture, Government is putting renewed thrust on specially targeted traits *i.e.* resistence to insect-pests, fungal and viral diseases, tolerance to abiotic stresses. The Government has already initiated and is strengthening research in the area of Genomics in selected crops/traits keeping in view the food and nutritional security of the nation.The Network projects to be launched have concrete plans on basic and strategic research related to gene discovery, allete mining, expression profiling for important traits, validation of gene functions and capacity building and human resource development with respect to functional genomics. In order to accelerate efforts in this area, the Govt. has established recently a National Containment-cum-Quarantine facility for transgenic planting material, a Plant Virus Testing facility and an autonomous National Centre for Plant Genome Research.

Installation of telemetry system

†1217. SHRIMATI KUM KUM RAI: Will the Minister of SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Meteorological Department of India is installing telemetry system in the country, especialy in thickly populated cities for the purpose of collection of accurate data regarding seismological activities;

(b) whether it is also a fact that as per the forecast made by geologists, Muzaffarpur district of Bihar including neighbouring districts have been declared as very sensitive zones like Orissa and Ahmedabad from seismological point of view;

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.